



## Baird demonstrates again he listens to, helps on our issues

Saturday, October 15, 2005

U.S. Rep. Brian Baird's visit to Lewis County this week was another reminder of how our congressman doesn't forget us in his sprawling 3rd District anchored by the Vancouver metro area to the south and Olympia metro area to the north.

Baird made it a point in his first campaign for Congress in 1998 and in his first term to come to Lewis County and pay attention to our interests and needs. He visited all the small cities and towns from Packwood to Pe Ell as well as the Twin Cities, and held numerous town hall meetings. To his credit, he continues to do that, even though he's now more securely in office.

Baird, who plans to run for a fifth two-year term next year, has convincingly demonstrated he does indeed listen to us and with an open mind.

We have had sharp political differences with Baird on some issues, but we have a lot of common ground on local economic issues especially and give him great credit for working hard for his district including our local communities.

Examples of Baird's work for us include his help for the steam plant and coal mine near Centralia with its vital employment for our area. He was a key supporter of the collaborative effort between environmentalists and the plant/mine owners in resolving the issue involving pollutant emissions. Costly litigation and even possible shutdown of the operation were avoided.

Lately, Baird assisted plant/mine owner TransAlta by overcoming bureaucratic obstacles to obtain a federal permit to move soil in a mine expansion project in which timing was key.

It's noteworthy that one of those crediting Democrat Baird for his help was TransAlta spokesman Richard DeBolt, a Chehalis Republican state legislator who heads his party in the House. When we have politicians from both sides of the aisle working together to keep this area's largest employer in business, we are being well served.

Baird has also worked diligently and persistently in behalf of programs and funding assistance with our federal tax dollars to combat the scourge of methamphetamine in our region. It is a problem that has overwhelmed local resources to combat.

Also, Baird has been an advocate for the way-overdue expansion of the White Pass Ski Area. More needs to be done to push for approval of the latest proposal, which is about as environmentally friendly as possible, avoid environmental lawsuits afterward and help with funding the expansion. The project would be a big boost in new tourism dollars for our economically stressed East Lewis County.

And Baird has gone to bat for Centralia on the issue of Tacoma Rail unsafely interfering with traffic flow through the city with its proposed upgrade of the old Chehalis Western railroad line.

Again, when our area is helped, we don't care which side of the aisle it comes from.

**INFORMED VOTERS:** Historian Rick Shenkman in an address at Centralia College this week, said America's democracy is in crisis.

Preserving our democracy requires informed voters and Americans are less informed now on their government, even with 24-hour cable news channels, than they were in the 1950s, Shenkman contends. That's because they rely less for their news on newspapers, which are the best mass media in conveying detailed, factual information, he said, and we agree.

An example is the detailed stories this newspaper regularly prints on candidates for public office, such as those for city councils and other local offices in this year's elections, including their stand on issues.

But there is a problem even with some newspapers in factually, accurately and fully informing readers, such as they are. The New York Times, our nation's newspaper of record, and some other major newspapers are too often guilty of liberal bias in the selection, quantity, placement, accuracy and emphasis in their news stories.

News coverage is supposed to be objective (stick to the facts) and fair (present different aspects and sides on issues). If it contains analysis or opinion, it should be labeled as such.

Any crisis in democracy we are experiencing because of inadequately informed voters is partly because of liberal bias in the mainstream media.

